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10.8 General periodical: *The Gentleman's Magazine*

Irma Taavitsainen

1. Chronological coverage

Some medical knowledge belonged to the education of every civilized member of society in the eighteenth century, but its scope and depth varied. The most important channels for the dissemination of this knowledge to lay readers were newspapers, books, and booklets. Periodicals increased in importance, especially as new publication channels were established. The first periodical magazine was *The Gentleman's Magazine* (hereafter GM, 1731–1922). It provided a new channel for members of elite classes to keep abreast with current ideas and innovations, and what was happening in the world in general. A selection of medical texts is included in LMEMT to show how medical knowledge disseminated to educated members of the social elite. It also demonstrates how polemical matters were debated in the written form, what the foci of health issues were and how they changed in the course of time.¹ Through this unique window, it is possible to view what the literate public was told about topical issues in science and medicine (Porter 1985b; Finger & Ferguson 2009). Several GM medical texts were written in dialogue with a previous item so that we can gain access to the appropriation of medical matters and create a picture of eighteenth-century mindsets.

1.1 *Origins of The Gentleman's Magazine*

The founding father of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Edward Cave (1691–1754), acted as the editor for more than two decades and was largely responsible for the policy of the magazine.² The popularity of the reasonably priced magazine grew quickly, and by the mid-century, it had achieved a large readership with some 10,000 subscribers and some 15,000 readers (Porter 1985b: 141). The aim of the new publication was stated in the preface of the inaugural issue:

¹ In this sense, this section of LMEMT is more compatible with Section “Appendix: Medicine in society” in EMENT than any other corpus category (see Taavitsainen & Suhr 2010).

² Other people involved with the magazine in its formative years include Samuel Johnson, who carried out major editorial duties between 1738 and 1740.

(1) ...to give a Monthly View of all the News-papers...and in the next Place, we shall join therewith some other Matters of use or Amusement ... Essays on various Subjects for Entertainment ... Matters of Publick concern, communicated to the World by Persons of Capacity...

(GM 1731: preface)

The most important aim was informative, and the contents include parliamentary reports, political affairs, reviews, and reports on various issues of current interest, social gossip, and the Americas. At first, scientific items were not very frequent, but they increased in the latter half of the century with a general shift to more informative topics (Carlson 1938: 191). In addition, the magazine contained entertainment and this side is present also in the medical items (see below).

1.2 Compilation principles

Data for *The Gentleman's Magazine* were collected from *The Burney Collection Online* during the Lent term in 2012 at the University Library in Cambridge.³ No complete or modern index of the GM texts was available at the time, and thus, this selection is based on screening the contents. Our selection does not aim at conclusiveness but at giving a sample of medical texts in the GM that display how medical matters were communicated to an educated public, including both lay and professional readers in polite society. To select the articles, all issues from every sixth year from the founding of the magazine were checked for medical items. No detailed information is available about the contents, but we can assume that our material covers about ten per cent of the total of medical items; the estimate is based on our sample, but the frequencies of medical items vary a great deal from year to year.⁴ There are

³ In April 2016, access to the GM was through ejournals@cambridge, British periodical collection at Cambridge University Library. No comprehensive eighteenth-century website with a full GM database is available.

⁴ Online resources for searching for the GM materials on various topics will help researchers find more data according to their own research interests. An eighteenth-century index has been compiled by Ayscough (1789, 1818), with a prominent name index and a shorter topic word section. Modern online sites with GM materials include Hathi Trust Digital Library (n.d.) and *The Gentleman's Magazine: The 18th Century Answer to Google*.

several borderline cases of texts that are in some ways connected with medicine or health issues, but excluded from the present selection for various reasons. Most importantly, verse and other peripheral materials were excluded.⁵

2. Overview of the category

The range of topics in this category is wide, including both continuation from earlier discussion themes and new openings, with some texts overlapping with other corpus categories. Several texts published in the GM were extracts taken directly from other contemporary sources, with accurate references.

2.1. *Spearhead medical literature*

The academic end of medical writing is well represented in our sample by extracts from learned books, journals, and reports on both domestic and foreign advances of medicine. Learned domestic sources include professional books and scientific journals such as *Medical Transactions*, published by the College of Physicians in London, and *The Philosophical Transactions* (PT). News from foreign institutions is included in reports from abroad, e.g. “Disorders lately cured at Stockholm, by Electrification” (GM 1755: 111), texts from the Academy of Sciences in Paris and *Memoirs of the Academy of Turin*. Another article includes a covering letter of the effects of music enhances its “great use to Mankind” and continues by stating that “it will not be unentertaining to your Readers to see some well attested Instances...upon which the learned may comment at their Leisure” (1743: 422, in *Hist. de l’Academie Royale des Sciences* 1707: 8). From the same source is also a translation of experiments “concerning the Putrefaction of the Juices and Humours of Animal Bodies”, and refers to “M. de la Garaye, a gentleman of great eminence, in France” (1761: 213). The latest achievements of anatomical and surgical knowledge and improvements to children’s well-being received attention in articles such as “Observations of the very

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/ls?field1=ocr;q1=The%20Gentleman%27s%20Magazine;a=src;hls;lm=ft> and <http://www.otago.ac.nz/library/exhibitions/gentlemansmagazine/>. Accessed 26 June 2018.

⁵ Most important of the excluded items were Bills of Mortality; it is important to know about these items, but they contain very little for linguistic analysis.

ingenious Dr Hales, in his *Treatise of Ventilators*” for the benefit of “young tender Infants” (1743: 432).

2.2 Polemical topics of societal impact

Drinking habits and the social conditions receive a great deal of attention. The Gin Act, issued in 1751, was preceded by a lively discussion in the GM. The polemical tone against excessive consumption of alcohol was sharp with a strong patriotic flavour.⁶ Besides spirits, other stimulants like tea, tobacco and snuff were discussed. Tea was strongly opposed as unsuitable for the English diet according to the doctrine of “naturals” of Galenic medicine:

(2) ... our pleasant Eatables and Drinkables should be of home growth: For in Britain ... our very Appetites and Passions must be very different from those in India,... . The pleasant Herbs and Fruits of each Country must also be so different in their Qualities, that it is not reasonable to expect, that they should agree with the different Inhabitants. We see this is true by Experience: When Englishmen go to the East-Indies, the Diet there is so different from ours here, that notwithstanding the English on the Spot have naturalized it as much as possible, yet Multitudes dye ...
(GM 1737: 213 reprint from *Grubstreet Journal*, No. 379)

The last statement was picked up by an opponent who, after quoting it, remarks that the author’s statement “Multitudes die” must be rectified: “[t]his is not owing to the Change of Diet, but to the Violent Heat of the Country” (1737: 424). He continues in the same vein, playing down each argument in turn. The discussion continued in another article “by a learned Physician” concerning the ill effects of tea on women’s complexions:

⁶ See also 1743: 137, 1743: 189, and 1743: 432b.

(3) As to Beauty (a very prevailing Motive with Women ...)

Tea increases the Quantity of Bile in too frequent Drinkers of it. Now what Physicians call Bile, is a Yellow, Bitter, (and consequently Hot,) Liquor diffused about the Body.—And underneath the Fine Thin Skin of Women’s Faces, where it communicates its Ill-Favour’d, Dingy Colour, making Women, if they are of Cool Constitutions, to look very Pale, or Tawny, or Swarthy: And if they are of Warmer Constitutions, Then it gives them Red, Ruby, Plain-looking Faces, and Red Noses. And the Hot Adust Quality of this Bilous Humour in their Faces, Dries up, and Shrivels their Skin. And thereby brings Wrinkles on Women’s Faces, long before Age does. Hence Physicians call Bile the Mother of Deformity, and Nothing increases Bile more in Womens Faces, than too Frequent Drinking of Tea.

(GM 1737: 214–215)

Another hotly debated topic was inoculation against the small-pox “occasioned by its now raging in several large Towns” (1737: 561). The advantages were advocated on a professional level: the contributions are signed by doctors and surgeons of the highest rank (see Chapter x in this volume).

(4) It must, with all thankfulness, be acknowledged, that the inventors and improvers of it deserve to be ranked among the first benefactors of their fellow creatures. But, whilst we gladly pay them this tribute of gratitude, we cannot but lament that this practice hath been abused and perverted to the destruction of many lives, which might have been preserved. Inspect the yearly bills, and you will find, ...

(GM 1767: 254)

Smallpox is also discussed from another angle, namely that the inhabitants of St. Helena are “utterly unacquainted with the small-pox” thanks to its salubrious climate (1755: 502). Preventive rules for the gout are given by Dr. Grant, advocating people to move away from “flat fertile cultivated plains”, to “avoid populous towns and great

cities” and amuse themselves with fishing, wading, and walking (1780: 276–277). Polemical debates are recorded in letters of opposing opinions by medical doctors delivered in somewhat sarcastic tones (1798: 192). An unknown epidemic disease had raged at Rouen and set exaggerated false rumours in Britain; a description of the disease was printed as a translation to rectify the erroneous accounts. Texts dealing with the plague include a historical account by Procopius (sixth century), probably intended for amusement for readers familiar with classical literature.

Mental health issues pop up occasionally, but are not prominent in the GM.⁷ An article from the *Weekly Register* (Ireland) titled “On the Spleen” deals with “odd-constitution’d People how they err” (1731: 522). Another article on wit, humour, madness, and folly has literary merits that make it entertaining:

(5) Judgment and Discretion are the Limits of Sense and genuine Wit: Below these is an endless Variety of monstrous and irregular Minds. Thro’ the Deviations of Nature in the Formation of the Head, Thousands are incompleat to One that is brought to Perfection. Hence Fops, Half-wits, Pedants and Coxcombs are sub-divided into numberless Branches, all diversified by their peculiar Oddnesses and specifick Caprices, which arise, perhaps, only from an improper Length, Size or Situation of a Fibre, from a disproportion’d Humour; or an immoderate Ferment in the Composition.

(GM 1731: 490)

2.3 Sensations

Miraculous cures and monstrous births continued to fascinate people’s imagination with articles reporting on a fetus in a woman’s body for thirteen years (1743: 484), “the proportions of an extraordinary large child” (1780: 126),⁸ and a correspondent reported on a miraculous healing of dropsy at Königsberg. News about hazards of life and death occur in the early issues, sometimes in concise statements like “A Man run over and kill’d in Oldstreet” (1731: 222). The contents change with time, as first-aid

⁷ Melancholy had become a popular topic in literature in the previous century with Burton’s *Anatomy of melancholy* (1621), included in EMENT.

⁸ With details of its origin to guarantee its veracity: by “Mr. Sherwen, an ingenious surgeon and apothecary ... sent to the Secretary to the Royal Society” (1780: 126).

advice on how to behave in case of emergency was added in keeping with a rising interest in the public good.⁹

(6) Mr Urban, A Sailor, of about 25 years of age, whose horse had run away with him, endeavouring to dismount whilst on a full gallop, threw his right leg over the horse's head, and sliding down ... to cause a dislocation of the thighbone. Being sent for, I got him laid on his back on a bed, with his right thigh and leg duly extended:... , I easily saw the defect; ... I judged... the following operations: ... then taking a very long towel, I tied it once round the patient's knee, ... the patient's immediate relief from his agony,... Next morning, to my great surprize, I was told my patient was walked out; ... and, luckily for him, no tumour, inflammation, or other bad symptom followed; and he soon after went to sea.

(GM 1761: 521–522)

The correspondent was a surgeon from West Cowes, Isle of Wight, and he refers to articles in the GM, taken from the PT, which “determined me, by the channel of your useful Magazine, to communicate to the public the above case” (1761: 522).

2.4 Cures and health issues

Cures and recipes for various ailments form the most prominent medical items in the GM all through the century and public health concerns are also present.¹⁰ Medical advice is given to people suffering from various diseases, such as consumption or asthma, measles, naval rupture, dropsy, ulcerated cancers, and venereal diseases. Home medicine is conspicuously present. Animal bites prompted several people to exchange their experiences on the prevention and cure of “canine madness” or the bite of a mad dog. A lively discussion on vipers (1798: 479, 665) was initiated by a plea

⁹ See also GM 1792: 707.

¹⁰ Common good is mentioned several times, e.g. “... communicating to the publick whatever may be of general use. Falls and bruises frequently happen in country places where there may not be any medical assistance near” (GM 1792: 707; see Taavitsainen 2015: 148–149).

for good advice against their poison. “Nostrums” and in particular Dr. Ward’s Pills (1798: 647, 739), are debated in several contributions. One of the most versatile themes especially in the mid-century concerns poisonous and healing plants, with special attention being given to hemlock.¹¹ Plants were important ingredients of medicaments throughout the period. Recipes are given against the gout, yellow fever, cancer, the pestilence, and blisters, and the use of vegetable acid is also discussed. Children are discussed in a number of texts from different angles (e.g. 1761: 493; 1767: 362), including instructions for nursing and cures for children’s diseases. Curative baths were a fashionable theme, treated in a promotional tone in some texts (1761: 488). An extract from a book describes how people returning to town from the country easily catch a cold, and preventive measures and cures follow (1761: 524). The popular end contains personal accounts and general musings on everyday observations, such as why a person is shorter when standing than when lying down, and shorter in the evening than in the morning (1767: 590).

Longevity was a topic of keen interest throughout the century, and it is discussed in several articles. An article from the first year (1731: 377) tells about an “old gentleman, near 90, who has a florid and vigorous constitution”, and continues with praise to the old English way of life with regimen advice (see also Chapter 4 in this volume).¹² A travelogue with the longevity theme (1798: 467) praises healthy lifestyles in the Western parts of North Britain, and was clearly intended for amusement (see Chapter x in this volume).

2.6 *Public institutes*

Public health issues received increasing attention. The utility of hospitals is discussed along with societal worries and suggested remedies, e.g. by drawing attention to the cure of lunatics in a Manchester infirmary that could set an example “with very considerable success” for other parts of the country (1773: 184). British sailors’ miserable diet is discussed with concrete suggestions for improvement. A patriotic tone is present for the public good of the nation.

¹¹ The discussion was initiated by Anthony Störck, Physician to the Empress Queen in Vienna.

¹² This in accordance with the nostalgic theme of the golden past, cf. medieval literature, e.g. Chaucer.

(7) EVERY hint that has a tendency to better the condition of British sailors, the brave assertors of our country's independence, will, I am certain, be well received ... There are some evils to which this class of men are exposed, which the utmost attention on the part of Government, as well as on the part of their respective commanders, cannot at all times prevent. You will perceive that I allude to the diseases incident to a seafaring life ... the Scurvy. Of late years, several naval physicians and surgeons have done much towards the prevention and cure of this disorder; ...

(GM 1798: 823)

(8) Mr. Urban, ... I AM pleased to see that my hints respecting the use of raw carrots in the Sea-scurvy have served to call forth the attention ... ; but I beg leave to inform him, that ... in many instances they have had a beneficial effect; but, on the whole, they have been found much less powerful in counteracting the Marine-scurvy than the vegetable acids, and more especially than fresh fruits and fresh roots. ... but, next to the fresh juice of lemons, vinegar, spiced with ginger and mustard-seed, is the best acid that can be employed in the Sea scurvy.

(GM 1798: 1029)

3. Authors and audiences

Medical doctors and surgeons were well represented contributors to the GM, although most writers used pseudonyms or initials, or wrote anonymously. Edward Cave adopted an editorial pseudonym that combined the images of town and country, "Sylvanus Urban". The new magazine was targeted at an educated lay readership from polite society and shows that "being familiar with medicine was not an individual and private matter, but integral to the public role of the well-informed, public-spirited, and responsible layman" (Porter 1985b: 163). Readers could also

actively take part in the discussions and interact with each other by sending letters to the editor (Rousseau 2002: 180; see also Chapter 5 in this volume).

4. Discourse forms and genres

As a channel of communication, the GM fulfilled an important function and its readers and editorial staff formed a loose discourse community. Several topics are discussed in contributions from the readers in chains of texts that run through shorter or longer periods with advice, recipes, and cures, often referencing other contributions in polite interaction. Some letters are written from the patients' point of view according to the autobiographical trend that started in the early modern period (van der Wal and Rutten 2013), and patients' voices can be heard for the first time in case narratives about readers' own experience. For example, a discussion on kidney stones and intestinal worms was initiated by autobiographical accounts by readers suffering from these ailments. This discussion was responded to enthusiastically, which shows how common such ailments were. In addition, another autobiographical account contains criticism about medical practices and bitter comments about the hypocrisy of some highly-educated doctors.

Some genres of medical literature had already been established before this period: medical recipes acquired a set form in Middle English (see Taavitsainen 2001) and experiments in the PT reports; others like "advertisement" and "essay" were already in use in other fields, but some genres were in the formation. Some text labels reflect discourse forms like "description" and "narrative" or communicative forms like "pamphlet" and "letter", even speech acts like "proposal", "advice", "attack", and "address" are used as labels (see Taavitsainen 2017b).

Book reviews had started to appear in the previous century in the PT (see Gray et al. 2011). These texts became more numerous in the last decades, and they adopted a more standardized form. Mostly, these texts give information about recent publications and overlap with book advertisements, but there are also critical evaluations. Sharp polemics is found e.g. in the following review:

- (9) A Guide for Gentlemen studying Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. ... IN whatever light we view this pamphlet, it appears to be a very extraordinary performance. If it be meant to serve the

interests of the medical school of Edinburgh, it is one of the most injudicious attempts of the kind that we have ever seen, and such as must be rejected with indignation by those to whom it is “with respect offered by the author”. If it be Mr. Johnson’s intention to expose the medical professors to contempt and ridicule, we cannot say that his wit is keen or his irony delicate. (GM 1792: 1027)

The end of the century brought some novel topics into the discussion. A text entitled “Tropical Diseases, on Military Operations, and on the Climate of the West Indies” (1792: 60) is connected with the expansion of the British Empire that brought new health hazards and exposed people to new diseases in foreign climates. It discusses intestinal fever, “deriving its origin from obstructed perspiration, depending on some secret influence in the atmosphere, or sudden transitions of the air...” (1792: 1027).

5. Reprints, translations, and original compositions

The editor of the magazine wanted to give an impartial summary of all that newspapers wrote about, and a great part of the published items were extracted directly from other printed sources with accurate statements of the origins. They were first printed in London newspapers like *The Daily Courant*, *The Daily Journal*, and *The Grub-Street Journal*, but sources from other geographical locations, like Dublin and Edinburgh, were also cited. Some summaries of mostly book publications were also given and translations from foreign sources were important (see Section 2.1 above). Book reviews were either composed for the GM or were reprints from other publications, and letters sent to the editor were *ad hoc* compositions.

6. Continuity versus new trends

The eighteenth century was a period of fundamental reform in medicine as both the methodology and the theoretical basis underwent changes, and the practical side developed as well. The GM dealt with innovation and novel aspects, but blended with more traditional concerns and even inherited wisdom. It is possible to discern several overlaps with earlier text traditions. For example, prognostications and reports on how the weather influenced health have always interested people at large, and lists of

diseases caused by the hot weather resemble old received knowledge, e.g. such lists as “Bilious cholicks, inflammations of the bowels, remittent fevers, with violent headaches, vomiting, restlessness, fainting, high colour’d urine...” (1753: 23) were already found in medieval texts.

But all in all, the innovative aspects in changing thought-styles are more prominent and can be found in the increasing interest in demographic and medical issues. Societal concerns along with institutional issues were of interest to the readers of the GM. There is a clear line of development in the contents towards more factual articles and discussions, although miracle cures or unusual cases occur throughout the century. The growing interest in public affairs and public welfare is obvious in the reports on founding of new hospitals and other medical charities.